

PUBLIC INFORMATION ANNEX

TO

MADISON COUNTY

DISASTER & EMERGENCY

PLAN

(July 2006)

PUBLIC INFORMATION ANNEX

PURPOSE

Today's society has come to expect accurate, real-time information. Ignoring this expectation can lead to inaccurate representations of emergency operations and cause a wide variety of negative repercussions. The purpose of this annex is to outline the means, organization and process by which appropriate information and instructions are to be provided to the public before, during and after emergency situations. It sets forth public communications procedures and policies designed to enable the coordination and dissemination of timely public information related to incidents involving Madison County residents and visitors.

SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. Madison County faces a number of hazards which may cause emergency situations to come into being. Section 6 of the main body of this Disaster and Emergency Plan sets a summary of the most apparent of those hazards and their possible impact. The county Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan similarly assesses the nature of some of those hazards.

2. During emergencies, the public needs timely, accurate information on the situation and appropriate instructions or guidance regarding protective actions that should be taken to minimize injuries, loss of life and damage to property as well as to facilitate recovery as early and effectively as possible.

3. For some slowly developing emergency situations (such as flood, winter storms or wildland fire) there may be several days for county authorities and the media to provide detailed information about the hazard and what residents and visitors should do. For other emergency situations, there may be no warning, leaving the public information system over-taxed to inform the public about the hazard and what to do about it. For this reason, it is important that the public be advised of likely hazards, what to expect should they occur, and what protective measures that should be taken to lessen the effect of an emergency or disaster involving those hazards.

4. Experience has shown that institutional pressures, family concerns, peer perceptions and a host of other deeply rooted processes can, for good or ill, affect communication and response during an emergency. People in general tend to receive, assimilate and respond to information differently during emergencies than they do during "normal" times. Research indicates that perceptions of risk tend to be adversely affected by factors such as:

- Newness (as opposed to risks that have been experienced previously or for some time)
- Uncertainty (compared with risks which are fully understood)
- Imposed (compared to risks voluntarily entered into)
- Catastrophic nature (“event” risks, such as plane crashes, as opposed to risk that occur to individuals over time, such as heart disease)
- Availability to individual consciousness (the greater awareness, the greater the concern)
- Personification (a risk that has a real victim with a name and a face in comparison to a theoretical risk)
- Personal risk (that might happen to the individual involved, such as anthrax in the mail, as opposed to a risk that, while real, is thought of as only happening to someone else, particularly someone far removed in time or distance)

It becomes apparent, therefore, the role that understandable and factual information availability before, during and after an emergency or disaster can influence the way in which people may perceive and react to the event.

5. A constant flow of accurate information is imperative internally to the responders and emergency management community as well as externally to the public at large.

B. Assumptions

1. An effective program combining both education and emergency information can significantly reduce loss of life and property. Many people, however, are unconcerned about hazards until they are directly affected and will not willingly participate in or attempt to retain emergency educational information. Special emphasis must be placed on the delivery of appropriate emergency information during emergencies and disasters, therefore.

2. There is a paucity of truly local information media. The neighboring urban centers of Butte, Bozeman and Dillon are major sources of news and other information dissemination for county residents, although the weekly *Madisonian* does participate significantly. In general, the media will cooperate in disseminating warnings and other necessary public information during emergency situations and may participate in pre-disaster awareness programs and other disaster education activities. Media outlets are able to function as strong allies by transmitting important information and instructions to the public, however that capability must be developed and nurtured into a trusted and understandable system of information dissemination.

3. Some emergency situations have the potential to generate substantial news media interest and draw both area coverage and media representatives from outside the local area. This could quickly overwhelm the indigenous public information infrastructure, which has no dedicated public information staff.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. For convenience, public information may be characterized as educational, informational or instructional in nature. Educational material focuses on preparing the recipient for an emergency event and enhancing his or her overall capability to respond appropriately to their own best interests and that of their family and neighbors. Education efforts are directed toward increasing public awareness about potential hazards and how people should prepare for them.

2. Informational material serves to clarify the existing situation in order to allow the recipient to more accurately assess how it applies to him or her and the nature of attendant risks in order that he or she may determine the proper actions that they and their family and neighbors may need to take. Special effort must be made to keep the public informed of the general progress of events. Reporting positive information regarding emergency response will help reassure the community. Rumor control is also a major aspect of this effort. Public feedback should be used as a measure of the program's effectiveness.

3. Instructional public information stems from the decisions of qualified and authorized officials and implements those decisions to the greater good of the populace. Focusing on specific event-related information, it usually relates to such things as warnings, evacuation orders, shelter and aid information, and other procedural matters.

B. Information Dissemination

1. The following means may be used to provide emergency information and instructions to the public in case of emergency:

- a. Emergency Alert System (EAS) broadcasts by radio, television, and cable companies.
- b. Regular or special news broadcasts by radio, television and cable companies.
- c. Local and regional newspapers.
- d. Formal and informal telephone warning/information systems, which may be manual or automatic in their application.
- e. Mobile units with public address systems and individuals designated to respond to unique situations which may develop..
- f. The Madison County and other official web-sites.
- g. Internet sites, including private and public "blog" sites.
- h. Private and public news services.
- i. Door to door notification by designated responders or volunteers

2. Special needs populations will also require warning and situational information which will require special efforts by the public safety community. Visually impaired persons may be able to receive information through EAS messages and news advisories

on commercial radio, NOAA Weather Radio or Ham radio. They may also require door-to-door notification. The hearing impaired may be able to receive captioned messages on television or through the print media. Non-english speakers, those having cognitive impairment and those having other special needs will need to be assessed and addressed based upon the judgment of the responders at the time, however these needs and possibilities cannot be forgotten as the situation develops.

3. The Incident Commander will commonly see that the public receives the first warning in and around the site of the incident. When he or she deems it necessary Command will designate a Public Information Officer as part of the command staff. The PIO will usually work out of the Command Post. He or she will provide information on the emergency situation to the media as appropriate. When the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has been activated, the command PIO will work in coordination with the County PIO, who is usually headquartered in the (EOC) or in close proximity thereto...All information relayed to the media by either PIO must be approved by Incident Command and the appropriate county official, regardless of whether the incident is a small, single command or a more elaborate unified structure. Similarly, it is of vital importance that conflicting information not be provided, particularly when it is identified as coming from official sources..

4. Once the EOC has been activated, the EOC Supervisor will normally determine the need for additional warnings and instructions, although this determination will be made working closely with the Incident Commander. The PIO staff will formulate additional warning messages and public instructions guided by the sample messages contained in this Disaster and Emergency Plan. Execution of such warnings and instructions will usually be done under supervision of the Incident General Staff. Media news advisories, arrangements for interviews or special briefings and the like will usually be coordinated by the EOC PIO staff.

5. In the case of large scale emergencies or disasters where there are substantial external responders from other jurisdictions and/or state or federal agencies involved and when the response and recovery effort is expected to continue for an extended period, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be established (frequently in close proximity to the EOC). The JIC is an element of the Joint Information System (JIS) developed to provide information to the public during an emergency. It is a working facility wherein the emergency public information efforts of all participating jurisdictions, agencies, volunteer organizations, and other responders can be coordinated to ensure consistency and accuracy in getting information where it needs to go. In federally declared incidents, a JIC will typically be set up as part of the Joint Field Office (JFO).

ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. General.

The overall responsibility for providing emergency information and instructions to the public rests with the senior elected official of the jurisdiction involved, Typically this

would be the Board of County Commissioners and, as appropriate, the mayor of the incorporated town or towns in which the incident occurs. The County Commissioners provide general guidance for public information programs and activities and may appoint a qualified county Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO (or the Director of Emergency Management if a PIO has not been designated) will manage and coordinate all emergency public information related activities and direct such staff as may be assigned or recruited to assist in those activities. Whenever possible, trained public information specialists will staff PIO positions at the Incident Command Post (ICP) and in the EOC.

B. Responsibilities.

1. The County Commissioners shall:

- a. Appoint a Public Information Officer or assign someone to carry out or assist in those duties as appropriate.
- b. Ensure that the jurisdiction has implemented and institutionalized processes and procedures to coordinate and integrate public information functions including the development of a public education program for emergency situations.
- c. Authorize release of all IC approved incident information to the media.
- d. Ensure that a Joint Information Center is activated when warranted by the incident.
- e. Seek the counsel and guidance of the County PIO before disclosing information to the press.

2. The County Public Information Officer (PIO) shall:

- a. Represent and advise the elected officials and such other prominent personages as may be officially involved on all public information matters relating to the management of the incident. In the event there is no Incident PIO, he or she shall similarly represent and advise the IC while ensuring that the release of all incident related information has the prior approval of the IC.
- b. Coordinate and integrate public information functions across jurisdictional and functional agencies as required. Coordinate the public information efforts of local government.
- c. Develop complete and accurate information on emergency incidents for both internal and external consumption. Maintain a file of all news advisories and press releases issued during emergency operations.
- d. Serve as the County representative in the JIC and as representative to the Unified Management Committee. As a general rule, the PIO will attend as many committee meetings as circumstances permit in order to have the necessary background to effectively perform his or her job.
- e. Conduct public information activities as an ongoing activity.
- f. Develop and disseminate public information materials and maintain a stock of materials for emergency use based on hazards likely to confront the county. Such materials should include general materials dealing with the nature of hazards and basic protective actions to be taken; hazard specific instructions dealing with what to do in an

emergency; and information relating to how emergency warnings are disseminated and their meaning.

g. Develop and foster methods for distributing emergency public information to the public across the entire spectrum of media and potential recipients. Coordinate with broadcasters, print media and the like to develop procedures for local government to disseminate warning messages and emergency information through established public information media channels. To this end, the PIO shall also compile and maintain copies of newspaper articles, video tapes and news accounts to the extent possible for use in post-incident analysis and future training activities.

h. Authenticate sources of information, verify for accuracy and obtain necessary authorization before issuing news releases or otherwise disseminating information to the public.

i. Advise and assist local information in their relations with the media.

j. Monitor media coverage of emergency operations for accuracy of reports and issue corrections where necessary.

k. Provide authorized news releases to the media where appropriate and keep appropriate officials and responders informed.

l. Maintain a contact roster for public information media organizations that are or may be involved in emergency management efforts. Periodically brief the media on warning systems and procedures to be followed and keep them informed of significant changes in emergency planning and procedures..

m. Take action to control rumors.

n. Proactively seek to keep the media appropriately informed, including establishment of a media briefing area in the vicinity of the EOC when activated.

o. Foster the development of PIO capability within the county through formation of a Joint Information System (JIS) to ensure that integrated procedures, plans, policies and protocols are in place to facilitate accurate and timely flow of information.

p. Maintain a written record of contacts, decisions and events in which involved during an emergency incident or event.

3. The Director of Emergency Management shall:

a. Advise and assist the Board of Commissioners in the dissemination of emergency warnings, instructions and information to the public.

b. Coordinate with the county PIO in development of emergency messages. Seek to facilitate provision of timely and accurate information to the media and the public at large.

c. If a PIO has not been designated, manage and coordinate all emergency public information related activities as previously outlined and direct such staff as may be assigned or recruited to assist in those activities. Whenever possible, trained public information specialists will staff PIO positions at the Incident Command Post (ICP) and in the EOC.

d. Identify public concerns so that they may be addressed by the PIO in public information activities. Coordinate with the PIO in development of pre-scripted emergency messages.

4. All local government departments and agencies shall:

a. Refer media inquiries relative to emergencies and emergency situations to the PIO whenever possible.

b. Assist the PIO in responding to requests for information and make every effort to provide consistent and accurate information to the media and the public at large when at all possible.

DIRECTION AND CONTROL

A. General.

1. The Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, as the senior representative of the Board of Commissioners, has overall responsibility for the emergency public information program. The Board, acting through the Chairman, shall provide general guidance for emergency-related public education and information activities. The Board shall appoint a Public Information Officer and, in conjunction with the Incident Commander, approve, all information released to the news media. Authorization to approve such release may be delegated to the Director of Emergency Management or such other person as the Board may deem appropriate.

2. The Public Information Officer shall, as set forth under the Assignment of Responsibilities above, direct all emergency public information activities, coordinating as necessary with other individuals, departments and agencies performing other emergency functions.

3. The Director of Emergency Management shall facilitate the functioning of the PIO and such public information infrastructure as may be established to the maximum extent possible.

B. Line of Succession. The line of succession to PIO is:

1. Director of Emergency Management
2. County Planner
3. Public Health Administrator

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT

A. Records. The PIO officer shall make available the files and information maintained in the performance of his or her duties for post-incident analysis and educational purposes whenever possible.

B. Educational Programs.

1. The Public Information Officer and the Director of Emergency Management shall work together to conduct disaster education programs on a continuing basis to increase citizen awareness. Activities of the Citizen Corps Council (CCC) shall be facilitated and promoted in order to provide the maximum opportunity for such education to reach the public.
2. The PIO is expected to obtain and maintain materials for disaster-related public education, working closely with the CCC Administrator.
3. The principal providers of disaster and emergency related educational materials are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) the American red Cross and the Montana Disaster and Emergency Services Division (MT DES). Many agencies and volunteer organizations also publish specialized educations materials which can be useful.
4. The Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is specifically devoted to preparedness of the citizens. Public information efforts undertaken by the PIO or other government agencies shall make every effort to foster maximum participation in this important program.

C. Training. Persons involved in public information duties and others for whom public information is not their primary duty or even an assigned duty should attend public information training, preferably that focused on emergency public information duties..

D. Operating Support. The Public Information Officer is responsible for developing, promulgating and maintaining standard operating procedures (SOPs) covering recurring public information tasks.

ANNEX MAINTENANCE

The Public Information Officer is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex. The annex will be reviewed annually by the PIO. Recommendations for updating and alterations shall be made to the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) for forwarding to the Board of Commissioners at that time.

REFERENCES

Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986
Montana Code Annotated, particularly MCA 53-1-705 and all of Title 2, Section 6
FEMA, *Guide to All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning* (SLG 101)
DHS, *National Response Plan* (NRP)